

2160 AD

by J-117

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Summary: Before the UNSC came into being, there was the Interplanetary War. With peace failing, the nations of Earth must overcome their differences in order to fight the Frieden and Koslovic forces. This is the story of the rise of the UNSC.

1. Timeline

Author's Foreword

This story is based off of information given in the official Halo Timeline given out by Bungie and Microsoft some years ago, in order to show fans what had happened in Humanity's history up to the events that occur in Halo. While anyone can research this information by using sources ranging from Halopedia to Bungie itself, the clear consensus is that very little is known about the early pre-UNSC history of humanity. Thus I have taken the liberty of creating characters that although aren't in official Halo Canon, nonetheless serve to flesh out the story as it is told in the Halo Canon.

2160 A.D. originally started out as a Halo 2 machinama project for my clan ODSF. We were able to release a trailer before the release of Halo 3, but by that release we figured that we would have to put things on hold until we could figure out how best to use Halo 3 to film 2160. Unfortunately, in October 2007, due to ideological differences between the members, ODSF disbanded with me remaining as its sole member. But I felt that I had left the viewers who had liked the trailer without a product. Thus, I set forth to create a novella from what notes we had for the creation of the film.

What you the reader see before you is the finished product of long months of research and hard work. I hope you will enjoy reading into this fascinating but untouched period in Human history, as much as I have written it. Enjoy.

Timeline

2011: International Space Station completed

2016: American scientists and military personnel establish a colony on Luna

2033: American and Russian personnel establish a colony on Mars, on the Argyre Planitia

2069: European Union establishes a colony on Io, one of the Jovian Moons

2070-2080: Colonies established on other Jovian Moons: Europa, Ganymede, and Callisto

2102: Rich mineral deposits found on the Jovian Moons by German surveyors, contract for mining goes to the Unified German Republic

2109: Vladimir Koslov born in St. Petersburg, Russia

2111: With the hundredth anniversary of the completion of the International Space Station, the United Nations signs a treaty governing its sovereignty over colonial matters; all member nations sign the "Sovereignty Pact"

2128: Vladimir Koslov joins Russian Military, he becomes an exceptional leader

2145: Vladimir Koslov publishes _The Neo-Communist Manifesto_, where he preaches about a return to the glory days of the Soviet Union. The book is widely popular among the miners and lower class populace

2152: Vladimir Koslov declares war on the Russian Government, starts the Second Russian Revolution

2155: Koslovics win and establish the Federation of Soviet Democratic Republics (FSDR) where the Russian Federation used to be

2156: Anti-Koslovic sentiment brings forth the establishment of the Frieden party on the Jovian Moons

2158: Frieden party gains covert funding and support from corporations of the Unified German Republic

2159: Friedens attack Koslovic miners; widespread violence occurs all over the Jovian moons

December 2159: UN Secretary General Lestat, wishing an end to the unnecessary violence, sends Colonial Advisors Wilson and McDonald to Io to negotiate peace

2. Prologue

Prologue

Unified German Republic Colony Moon Io, December 29 2159 (Military Calendar)

Advisor Thomas Wilson straightened his tie as he stood in the airlock, awaiting passage into New Berlin, the capital of the Io colony. In his hand was his briefcase, filled with possible treaties and other such documents. He looked to his right and saw his partner, Advisor Jonathan McDonald, a fake smile plastered on his face. True, they both had to look professional and calm, but the bead of sweat smoothly sliding down Wilson's face said that he was anything but. The situation was tense to say the least. Before the Frieden attacks on the Koslovic miners, there had been over fifty thousand Russians working on the Jovian Moons. Nine months later, that number was less than one-tenth of what it used to be. Outraged that such violence could occur without any sort of response from the United Nations, the Federation of Soviet Democratic Republics had threatened to not only send troops to the Jovian moons, but to withdraw from the UN altogether. To have the FSDR do so would unravel the delicate balance of international cooperation that had built up over the past fifty years, which had ushered in a new era of strength for the ideal of a united humanity.

Unfortunately, the truth was that even with the passage of the Sovereignty Pact, the treaty that allowed the UN to take control over all off world colonies, proxy wars were only slightly less common now as they were back in the early twenty-first century. The largest of which had been the Second Russian Civil War, resulting in the re-establishment of a Communist Russia; and now anti-communist sentiment had caused a resurgence of German Fascism within their primary off world colonies: The Jovian Moons.

It was not hard to imagine that the well being of international relations and possibly even the survival of the UN as it stood now rested purely on how well the negotiations went between the Colonial Advisors and Chairman Frederic Werden, the leader of the Frieden Party.

As the airlock doors hissed open, a small blast of cold air hit the faces of Wilson and McDonald, along with the two UN Peacekeepers that served as bodyguards for the Advisors. Pressures being equalized, the four men stepped out of the airlock and into the station, a row of soldiers on either side of them. At the end of row were three men, dressed in elegant business suits. In the center was a tall man, with brown hair and a small beard that was trimmed precisely. On his left was a shorter man, bald and clean-shaven, his eyes shone with a fierce intensity that only came with a devout belief. Opposite him was a man even larger than the center figure, with a buzz-cut of blonde hair and muscles that strained his suit. The center figure approached Wilson and McDonald.

"Ah, you must be the Advisors; I am Frederic Werden, to my left is my Vice-Chairman Wilhelm Ostheim, and to my right is my personal assistant Adalric." Chairman Werden put forth his hand. Wilson shook it.

"It is a pleasure to meet you Chairman Werden. My name is Thomas Wilson, and this is my partner Jonathan McDonald. We're here on behalf of the United Nations."

"So I've been told" replied Werden. "Please, follow me to my office, where we can discuss business in private." Leaving the ceremonial soldiers behind, the group of seven ventured into the station, twisting down a kilometer of twists and turns until eventually coming

before an elegant door.

"I'm afraid your security detail will have to wait outside Advisors, but my assistant will be happy to keep them company while we discuss" said Werden, pausing before the door. The two Peacekeepers looked at Wilson and McDonald, the advisors nodded to them. The Peacekeepers took position on either side of the door, assault rifles in their hands as Wilson, McDonald, Werden, and Ostheim entered through the sliding door. Adalric just leaned on the opposite side of the small hallway, his left foot against the wall, and his grin showing.

Inside the decorated office was a desk on one side, and a longer table for larger discussions on the other side, with a UGR flag in the middle on the far side of the wall. On the table was nothing but an old wooden box.

"Before we begin, I wish to show you a relic of our past, to provide you with a cultural understanding of why we do what we do" said Werden. Wilson replied with a slight inquisitive look but came over to the table. Werden opened the box and inside was a small pistol, with a diagonal handle, a thin barrel that ended with a definitive sight.

"This Luger has been in my family for generations, a relic from my ancestor's time in the second World War. I show it to you now to prove that my people come from a proud past, for we are a proud people. But first I must ask you Advisor Wilson; do you know what 'Frieden' means?" Wilson had thoughts running through his head at a million kilometers a minute but remembered the answer to the Chairman's question.

"Peace" replied Wilson.

"Gut, Advisor, sehr gut. You see, 'Frieden' in our ideals, can only be achieved by stopping the oppressors on Terra Firma, and you unfortunately, are one of them." With that, Werden pulled the Luger from the box and fired at the Advisors, killing each with a bullet to the head.

Outside, hearing the gunshots, the Peacekeepers turned to burst through the door, when Adalric leapt for one of the Peacekeepers, pulling his gun away from him and sending him down with a strong kick to the knee. He then shot both Peacekeepers quickly, ending the short and deadly battle.

Adalric went through the door, staring at Werden's work.

"They're both taken care of mein herr" said Adalric blankly.

"Gut Adalric, be sure to destroy their transport as well" replied Werden. Adalric nodded and left the room quickly. Werden turned to Ostheim.

"Prepare a message to be sent to our men in the fatherland, along with another message to be sent to the UN Headquarters in New York" ordered Werden.

"Ja, mein herr" replied Ostheim, leaving Werden alone in the office. He starred at the flag of the UGR, thoughts pouring through his head.

He laid the Luger down onto his desk, his hands held the edge, quaking with determination.

"So it begins."

3. Chapter I: Declaration

Chapter I: Declaration

UN Headquarters, New York City, United States of America, December 30
2159

UN Secretary General Francoise Lestat stood from her center dais, looking across all the faces assembled in the General Assembly room. She saw all the range of emotions running through the Ambassadors, ranging from disgust to inquisitiveness to pure wondering of what was about to happen. She smoothed her skirt before addressing them.

"Good afternoon Ambassadors, I apologize for interrupting your holiday break but recent events have come to light that have required an emergency meeting." She paused to look over everyone once more, the Ambassadors now a little bit more engaged. "Yesterday at around 1400 hours, GMT, we received this footage from the Jovian Moon of Io. What you are about to witness is highly disturbing to say the least." With that, the large chambered darkened and the large screen behind the Secretary General came to life, showing grainy footage of the Colonial Advisors in the officer of Chairman Werden. There was no audio as the camera footage showed the Chairman pulling the Luger from the wooden box and assassinating the Advisors. The footage then cut to a view from a camera outside the station, showing the Advisors' transport hastily leaving its port. The transport did not get farther then a few hundred meters before a missile rose from a hidden SAM launcher and destroyed the transport. This was met with a simultaneous gasp from all in the chamber. The footage then cut to a direct view of Werden at his desk and the audio turned on when he spoke.

"Dear Ambassadors of the United Nations, I hope that the footage that you just witnessed wasn't too graphic, then again, I hope that you all understand what we, the Frieden, are capable of doing. For too long my people have suffered the injustice of Terra Firma's governments, for too long my people have suffered the blasphemies of the Koslovics and their nonsensical notions of equality, for too long my people have suffered the wrath that you, the earthborn have given us. Low wages, poor conditions, and a life filled with mining just to fuel your greed. We, the Frieden, will suffer your injustices no more, and will declare our secession from the Earth and its governments, and the establishment of the nation of the Frieden Reich. We hereby declare war upon the Koslovics, for Frieden cannot be achieved until the oppressors on Terra Firma are destroyed! Our resources are many, our fight is just, and there will be no peace until we have won!" The transmission cut off then, the lights in the chamber brightened, bringing a chorus of arguments to the Secretary General.

"Order, order! There shall be order in these chambers!" cried Lestat, bringing a gavel down upon her podium. The chamber quieted down and the Ambassadors sat in their seats. "It is clear that the Friedens

represent a serious threat to Earth and her colonies, and there will be justice served upon them. But before any serious decision regarding this delicate matter can be made, the Security Council shall give us their assessment on the situation. Thus, the Secretary General recognizes the Ambassador of the United States." The US Ambassador rose from his seat and moved forward to the podium below the rise where the Secretary General was. The Ambassador cleared his throat before speaking.

"After an emergency meeting yesterday with the Security Council, we voted ten-to-five that since the Friedens have murdered two of our Colonial Advisors in cold blood, that such an act would be treated as an act of war upon the United Nations as a whole." This statement was met with murmurs of general approval. The Ambassador waited a second for the murmurs to die down before continuing. "We also voted that because of the deliberate murders of the Advisors, that any sort of peace negotiations at this point in time would be meaningless. Thus, it is the Council's recommendation that a military force be assembled to go to the Jovian Moons to deliver an ultimatum of destruction to the Jovian Moons, if such a ultimatum is not met, then the force would proceed to attack the Friedens and defeat them before they can attack any more of Earth's colonies." The Ambassador took a pause to indicate that his immediate report was done. Immediately a signal came to the Secretary General from the German Ambassador.

"The Secretary General recognizes the Ambassador from UGR" said Lestat. The German Ambassador rose from his seat.

"Mr. Ambassador of the United States, I hope you realize that our colonies on the Jovian Moons have a population of over three hundred thousand, some of which are women and children. What does the Security Council plan to do regarding non-combatants?"

"Our ultimatum to the Frieden will include a plan to evacuate safely all non-combatants, regardless of whether the Frieden wish to fight us or not" the US Ambassador replied. The German Ambassador satisfied for the moment, sat down. The Russian Ambassador sent a signal to the Secretary General.

"The Secretary General recognizes the Ambassador from the FSDR." The Russian Ambassador rose from his seat.

"Mr. Ambassador, would you kindly tell how long it would take to assemble this force?"

"Our current estimate to assemble a multi-national fleet the size required to take on the Jovian Moons is two months, plus an additional month to travel to the colonies themselves" replied the American Ambassador, questioning why the Russian Ambassador would ask about a matter they discussed at the Security Council yesterday.

"Is there any military force that can arrive there sooner?" questioned the Russian Ambassador; this matter however, was not raised in the Security Council's meeting.

"The United States currently has a Marine Force Recon Company training on Mars. It could arrive at the Moons within three weeks. There are also several ships of various nationalities that are in the Asteroid Belt. They could arrive within sixteen days." The Russian Ambassador replied with a brief but thankless 'thank you' and sat

down. Suddenly, the German Ambassador shot up from his seat.

"Forgive my breach of procedure but I have dire news to tell." He held his hand to the receiver in his ear for a second, confirming what he had just been told. "It seems that Frieden terrorists have just staged a coup of the German government. Our top officials are currently being evacuated into a safe zone." This was met with gasps and loud murmurs.

"Order!" cried Lestat, once more. "It seems as if the Friedens are more widespread and tenacious than we previously thought."

"Madam Secretary General, I humbly request that I may be excused to deal with this matter on a more private level and also to appeal to all nations to aid my country" asked the German Ambassador. Lestat nodded to him and the German Ambassador left quickly. The Ambassador from the European Union sent a signal. Lestat recognized her. Even though every European country had a seat in the General Assembly, the EU had its own chair regarding matters affecting Europe as a whole.

"Due to the sensitivity of this matter, the EU will declare that the Unified German Republic be removed from the EU until a democratic, peaceful government be re-established in Germany." The German Ambassador was at the chamber doors when he heard this. Saddened, he bowed his head and left before he could hear any more. The Russian Ambassador sent a signal, Lestat recognized him.

"Clearly, if the Friedens have taken control of the German government, then they will take control of the German military and openly attack my country. I humbly ask the assembly if any nation will stop the Frieden before they commit such an act?" asked the Russian Ambassador. There was no reply in the chamber. Lestat spoke.

"As with the force to deal with the Jovian moons, a force to re-establish the rightful government of Germany will take time to assemble. I hope that the Federation is patient in this regard" said Lestat with a harsh tone in her voice. The Russian Ambassador face blushed red with anger.

"My people will not abide this waste of time unless direct action is made now! We must stop the Frieden before they attack another nation!"

"Please Mr. Ambassador, we are doing all that we can, but you must remember that everything will take a bit of time" replied Lestat, her annoyance with the Russian Ambassador growing every second.

"There will be no time. The Federation of Soviet Democratic Republics will not abide talk, we will only abide action. If the UN will not help us, then we will secede from the UN."

"So be it" replied Lestat. "I must ask you to leave these chambers then." The Russian Ambassador stormed out of there quickly.

"Long live Chairman Koslov!" he said before he slammed the doors shut to the chamber. Lestat pinched her nose, angered at how events were rapidly deteriorating her calm. Goddamnit she thought, taking a

breath before proceeding.

"Mr. Ambassador of the United States, would you care to continue your presentation?" Lestat stated.

"Certainly Madam Secretary General, now if you would take a look at your screens, we have drawn up preliminary plans regarding how to approach the moonsâ€|"

* * *

><p>Mare Erythraeum, Mars, December 30 2159 (Military Calendar)<p>

First Lieutenant Daniel Claymore lay prone in the endless red desert of Mars, viewing his surroundings through binoculars. He could not see anything or anyone for the moment. Then again, Mare Erythraeum was nothing but a large plain dotted with rocks here and there. In the vast distance, he could see one edge of a mountain range which surrounded the plain. He took his eyes and looked behind him, seeing the other twelve men in his First Squad, Alpha Platoon, First Force Reconnaissance of the United States Marine Corps. Normally, his position as squad leader would be held by a Non-Commissioned Officer such as a Staff Sergeant, but the structure of a Marine Corps Force Reconnaissance Company was more similar to a regular Marine Corps battalion than that of a standard company. Unlike the "rule of three" which was the standard for USMC unit structure, a FR Company had six platoons, one of which being a scout/sniper platoon. The company was lead by a Lieutenant Colonel, with an executive officer as a Major. Platoon commanders were Captains, and Squad leaders were First Lieutenants. Other than that, the resemblance to USMC unit structure stood.

"What do you see sir?" asked his second fireteam leader Second Lieutenant Walter Price.

"Nothing so far, but you know how Bravo Platoon works, they like to lure you into a secure feeling. They've most likely dug themselves a couple of foxholes behind those rocks to the northwest" replied Claymore, pointing his hand to a clump of large boulders a hundred meters away from them. "They probably have mines around some of the rocks near them as well, which makes crossing to them out of the question." He took a pause, thinking about what to do next before continuing. "Alright, first team, I want you to hook far to the left, see if you can get a bead on them and find out what range they have their mines planted at. Second team, I want you to move to the right and hook around behind them, try to get them into a crossfire. Third team, move with me, we're going to throw stun grenades to detonate some of the mines and distract the OpFor. Any questions?" There were none. Daniel pushed his hand forward, signaling go and rushed towards the enemy position. He reached into his utility belt on his armor and removed a stun grenade; he thumbed the activator and threw it short of the rock clump. It exploded sending a small shockwave out and sure enough, a mine detonated. He was about to jump the rock when a rough, grating voice spoke on his COM.

"Cease fire Marines, cease fire. Unfortunately we have to end the exercise prematurely. Something's just came up from HIGHCOM and we need all personnel to report back to the Pendleton immediately" ordered Lieutenant Colonel Raul Valencia, commanding officer of the

First Force Reconnaissance.

"Roger that sir" replied Claymore. "Alright men, stop in your tracks, we got something big happening. Report back to the evac point." _What the hell is going on here?_ Claymore thought, as he turned out to re-assemble his men.

Briefing Room, Aboard the USS Frigate _Pendleton_, In Orbit around Mars

Assembled in the large briefing room were all eighteen squad leaders, plus the six platoon commanders and operations officers as well. The briefing room was a standard one with slight stadium seating for thirty men and a podium next to a large screen. At the podium currently was Lieutenant Colonel Valencia. He was a fairly young man, only in his mid-forties, with salt and pepper hair, dedicated brown eyes and the scars that came from a lifetime in the Corps.

"Sorry to interrupt your war games boys but it seems like the Brass needs to send us out on an emergency mission." This was met with a slight chuckle from the men, as they knew that the only reason there were called in is when things went very bad. "Several hours ago, we received a transmission from High Command, and things are going south very quickly. Yesterday, two Colonial Advisors were assassinated on Io by Frieden leaders. To make things worse, the Friedens have taken control of the German government and analysts say that it's very possible that a ground war could ensue between them and Russia. But for now, our immediate concern is Io. HIGHCOM wants to send us in to gather intelligence about the moon before a UN military force comes in to invade. Trouble is, due to international politics and who-haw, getting a decent sized fleet to attack the Jovian moons will take two months, meaning we'll be there without reinforcements whatsoever. Any questions so far?" Captain James Carlucci raised his hand.

"Sir, what about other vessels, will we have any support?" Carlucci asked.

"We're to join up with two ships in the Asteroid Belt, the EUS _Verona_, and the PRCS _Huai He_. The _Huai He_ is a destroyer and the _Verona_ is a frigate" replied Valencia.

"Chinese and Italians 'ey?" said a Marine from Second Platoon.

"They may be from other countries but we are all under mandate from the UN, so we can be rest assured that they will cover us and support the operation" assured Valencia. The Marines nodded satisfied.

"Sir, what timetable are we working with?" asked Claymore.

"Given that the voyage there will take three weeks, we should arrive there by the twentieth. Reports indicate however that Io has a battalion of sensors, so the _Pendleton_ and other vessels will stay away from the moons as best as we can. We will deploy first to Europa, seeing as how it's merely a world-ocean covered in ice, and that it has the smallest population of the colonies there. Due to the possibility of being detected, we will deploy you eighteen hours out on hard burn. Which gives us considerable distance to observe; remember men, our primary mission is to observe and gather intelligence regarding emplacements, troop formations, etc. Our secondary mission will be to disrupt said operations if we can

stealthily do so. Our rules of engagement are fire only if strictly necessary. These orders come from the Commandant himself." The men nodded, taking it all down. There were no other questions, and the men were dismissed.

Daniel Claymore could not help but get a bad feeling however; the mission seemed daunting to say the least. He only hoped that the men would be able to last the whole time down there.

* * *

><p>UN World News Broadcast, Earth, December 31 2159<p>

"Welcome again from UN World News here in Geneva, Switzerland. Unfortunately, the New Year will start off on a sad note as footage received yesterday confirms that in the aftermath of yesterday's Frieden coup against the Unified German Republic, the President and Chancellor along with other German leaders were killed as their transport was destroyed by a surface-to-air missile." The footage cuts to a satellite video showing the burning remains of the transport. "It is in our sincere grief that we give our condolences to all families affected by the tragedy yesterday."

"In other news, the assassination of Colonial Advisors yesterday by Frieden leader Frederic Werden has prompted the UN to collaborate in a historic venture: building the first truly international space fleet. UN spokespersons stated that building a fleet to retake the Jovian Moons will take time and that the UN pleads for all civilians in the Jovian Moons to evacuate to safer locations."

"Also today, Chairman Vladimir Koslov of the Federation of Soviet Democratic Republics issued a statement proclaiming that while the Russian people appreciates all the support that United Nations has given the Federation, it will be up to the FSDR to eliminate the 'Frieden threat' from further terrorizing the people. Only when the Frieden have been eliminated will negotiations about re-entry into the United Nations occur."

"Even though the situation looks bleak, we at UN World News stay optimistic about the potential for humanity through diplomacy and peace. From us to you, the human race, we wish you good night, good luck, and a very happy New Year."

4. Chapter II: The Drop

Chapter II: The Drop

Helm of the USS Pendleton, Approaching Europa, Jovian Moons, January 20 2160 (Military Calendar)

A week after departing Mars, the Pendleton had rendezvous with the EU frigate Verona and the Chinese Destroyer Huai He in the Asteroid Belt. Once pleasantries were made, the taskforce of three set out on the two week uneventful journey to Jupiter and its moons, finally arriving about eighteen hours away from the moon of Europa, their current station; meanwhile, back on Earth, tensions were rising. Radio reports sent in from HIGHCOM said that the EU had blockaded the UGR, now under the full control of the Frieden. Polish troops surrounded it from the east, Scandinavian navies blocked the

north, Italian troops to the south, and French to the west. Despite this, both Russia and Germany were now rapidly militarizing their borders and domestically increasing their forces at an alarming rate. Civilian analysts presumed that war was going to ensue in Eastern Europe soon, regardless of the blockade. A second update issued that on Mars, Russian and American colonists were holding an uneasy truce, and the events on Earth could easily cause a war on Mars. But for now, the Pendleton's real focus was on the Jovian Moons.

Spaceship design had advanced considerably since the twenty-first century. The first colony ships to reach Mars and the Jovian Moons were essentially long, thin cylinders with a rotating wheel that provided both gravity and habitat modules for the crew of the ship. Modern twenty-second century design had improved upon this awkward design by retrofitting the gravity wheel along with bulking up the main cylinder itself. Most Frigates and Destroyers carried the same basic design: a long but bulky cylinder, ending in a number of engines in the back powered by a nuclear reactor, and a cockpit for the helm at the front. The frame of the ship was essentially four-sided like a square but with forty-five degree diagonal cuts to connect the sides rather than ninety-degree sharp corners. This made for an overall more aerodynamic design. The four engines at the back of the USS Pendleton, like most frigates, were arranged in diamond formation and could pivot up to sixty degrees in any rotation in order to turn and maneuver the ship. The dimensions of the Pendleton were three-hundred-fifty meters long, and seventy wide and tall, which was standard for most frigates.

The Pendleton, however, being a Special Forces warship, carried a few experimental pieces of equipment. Added to the basic frame at midpoint were two small wings that stretched out twenty meters from the sides of the ship. At the end of each wing was a somewhat large rocket which could turn a full three-hundred-sixty degrees on a vertical axis. These were for emergency maneuvers such as dodging various rounds. The other rocket in turn would be used to stabilize the ship once the maneuver was completed. Both rockets had five seconds of thrust, enough for two uses.

Captain Samuel Anderson sat in his chair in the middle of the helm. In front of him was Ensign Clarence Jones, the young and superb pilot of the Pendleton, slowing the ship down to a full halt at their present station, eighteen hours flight time outside of Europa. It was here that the edge of any possible sensor range from the moon stood, and Captain Anderson did not want his ship to be detected. He heard the door to the helm slid open; Anderson looked over his shoulder to find Lieutenant Colonel Raul Valencia.

"Fascinating isn't it?" Valencia said, stopping to the left of the Captain. Both of them were staring at the moon, out in the vast distance, with the beautiful backdrop of Jupiter providing an interesting context between the two planetary bodies.

"Europa? Yes, it is quite something" replied Anderson.

"I didn't mean that, although Europa does have its sheen to it. I was talking about the mission" Valencia stated.

"What do you mean?" questioned Anderson.

"Well, here we are, Marines, on our first space deployment with the

possibility of actual combat. This is the kind of stuff you read about in the science-fiction books of old. Hell, we're actually living it now" Valencia chuckled.

"Definitely, and this baby is our ticket to history" responded Anderson, grinning.

"I read about the ship in the preliminary briefings a few months before we arrived, but I want to hear in your words about what makes this ship so damn special" challenged Valencia.

"Very well Lieutenant Colonel. Where shall I begin? The armaments of the ship are experimental in nature. Our main weapon is a Gauss cannon, which is standard on most Frigates. The cannon can propel a 35mm depleted uranium slug at one-fiftieth the speed the light, which translates into six thousand kilometers per second. The energy required to propel a slug at such speeds however, is enormous enough that most ships normally had to slow down to half-speed in order to fire the cannon without redlining their reactor. The Pendleton is outfitted with a prototype for a new, more efficient reactor with a more extensive coolant system, which allows us to fire the cannon at full-speed without taxing the reactor. This new reactor also decreases the charging time of the cannon itself, which normally is hundred seconds, to seventy-five. That difference of twenty-five seconds will be crucial in any naval engagement. Our other armaments include five Mk XV Missile Launchers, each with three RIM-84 SM4 ship-to-ship missiles, which of course are that new class of missile that are space-rated with an active thrust range of six-hundred kilometers. The RIM-84's in particular had an advanced tracking system over other ship arms that allowed it to maneuver quickly to an evasive target. Finally, we have four 12.7x99 mm point-defense guns, one of each side, which completes our weapons tour on this baby."

"Hot damn" said Valencia, surprised.

"What? You think we get the same stuff as everyone else? You have to remember, we're Special Forces."

* * *

>In the center of the ship, underneath the fifty centimeters of titanium armor that wrapped around the frame of the ship was large rotating section of the ship. Made up of advanced materials, this section could spin more rotations without stressing the surrounding frame, increasing the gravity to point-eight-five gees instead of the standard two-thirds found on most frigates. This made the Pendleton a great deal more stable for its crew of two-hundred sixty Marines, and forty naval crewmen.

Daniel Claymore walked through the center section, which was evidently the mess hall, exited and turned right at a t-junction. He arrived at one of the four hangar bays. There were two bays on each side on the ship. Each bay carried an APC-2 Boar and a TC-20 Seagull. Daniel walked to the APC-2 Boar, giving it an once-over even though he had used the vehicle before. The boar was an armored personnel carrier with six large tires, four 7.62x51 mm machine guns, two in the middle and two in the rear. It had carrying capacity for up to thirteen soldiers (a full squad).

Satisfied with the Boar, Daniel turned to the TC-20 Seagull and did the same inspection as with the Boar. The Seagull was a troop carrier that was essentially a large box with a large cylinder on the top that ended in a three-pointed tail. On the rear of the box were the two main VTOL (Vertical Take Off and Landing) engines, and at the front of the box were two smaller vertical-only take off engines, which provided extra stability. On the sides of the craft was a 12.7x99 mm machine gun. The two side bays of the craft could hold up ten troops each, twenty total. Both vehicles were deployed through an airlock below where they were parked, and the airlocks could double as a vehicle lift.

Daniel remembered many missions where he had to stay cramped in that tight bay for hours on end. The current record was twelve, and he was not looking forward to this eighteen-hour deployment coming up soon. Satisfied he left the hangar bay, went back through the mess hall and took a left, where he arrived at his platoon's weapons locker located opposite his platoon's barracks. He found his locker, put in the small combination to the keypad, and opened it. He reached in and removed his Special Forces standard MSCAR-12, a twenty-round 7.62x51 mm assault rifle with a non-zooming smart scope that served as the sight. He went back to a table in the center of the room, sat down and started to disassemble the weapon, piece by piece, until it lay in a configuration on the table. He then took a rag from his locker, and some lubricant and went over each piece little by little, making sure the weapon would fire smoothly when he reassembled it.

"You only clean like that when you're troubled" said a voice calmly from the entrance to the room. Daniel nearly leapt in his chair. He spun around and saw Second Lieutenant Walter Price, leaning in the doorway.

"Jesus, Walter, you shouldn't sneak up on a Marine like that!" said Daniel, annoyed.

"Sorry sir, just making an observation" replied Walter.

"Cut the 'sir' crap Walter, we're not out in the field anymore" Daniel stated, chuckling.

"Well hell Daniel, you know what they say-"

"The Marines will install shit in your head 'till the day you die,' yea I know, I know" replied Daniel.

"So what is it?" asked Walter.

"Remember Boot? Me, you, Andy, and Lance?" asked Daniel

"How could I ever forget Boot? I'm surprised we even passed, considering all the trouble we caused the DI's" Walter laughed.

"Remember Jimmy Joyce?" Walter's laugh immediately stopped.

"Why the hell are you thinking about that again?" asked Walter, very serious.

"His face still haunts me Walter." Daniel closed his eyes, the events of that night playing through his mind for the hundredth time.

It was the after graduation party at the local bar near Parris Island, the Marine Corps training center. Daniel, Walter, Andy, and Lance were drinking the night away, even though they were underage by about three years. The bartender did not care, a former Marine himself, he had always said that any Marine could drink in his establishment as long as they didn't cause trouble. Trouble came that night however for one James Joyce, another Marine straight out of Boot like Daniel. James Joyce, named so for the author two centuries ago, was something of an awkward kid; he would always be getting in trouble with the DI's for the smallest thing. Thing was though, that the kid had a die-hard will to become a Marine. Everyone in the training platoon grew to like him however, especially because of his skill at impersonating the DI's during some of the lonelier nights in the bunks.

Jimmy, named that by the DI's because they hated authors, was gambling that night in the bar with three other men. One of them was a rough biker whose name still eluded Daniel. Against the wishes of his fellow Marines, Jimmy gambled with the other men. Jimmy won some and lost some rounds of poker. Then, he started losing continuously. Thinking that something was up, and being drunk enough to not realize it was a stupid idea, he accused the biker of cheating.

"Watch your mouth, boy" the biker said, his teeth grinning with gold and steel.

"Now this ain't fair and I want my money back, damnit!" replied Jimmy, slurring. The biker, fed up with the kid, pulled out a massive revolver and shot Jimmy right then and there in the chest. Jimmy flew back. Daniel and the others cried out and jumped the biker, disarming him while the Military Police arrested him. That being done, Daniel returned to Jimmy. His chest poured blood.

"I'm sorry, Daniel. I only wanted my money back" Jimmy said, the words barely escaping his lips.

"It's ok Jimmy, you don't have anything to apologize for, you're going to be alright man. You're going to be alright" said Daniel. But Jimmy's face just stood still, dead.

Daniel opened his eyes again. "It's been seven years Walter, and I still think I could've done something to save him."

"Daniel, we both know that Jimmy was being stupid that night and that there was nothing nobody could do, ok?" replied Walter.

"Yeah, you're right" said Daniel.

"All squad leaders and above personnel, please report to the Briefing room, thank you" came a computerized voice from the PA.

"Guess that means you mate" said Walter.

"Yea, I'll see you in a bit" said Daniel as he quickly reassembled the SCAR, stashed it in his locker alongside his armor, and proceeded down the main corridor and through the center section, through to the Briefing room, which sat next to a staircase, above the corridor and next to the hangar bays. He took his seat quietly, hearing the other men around him whispering about what the plan for attack might be.

Lieutenant Colonel Raul Valencia, standing next to the main screen, cleared his throat. The men were instantly quiet.

"Well men it looks like we're finally here. We just spent the last few hours looking over the photos of Europa sent back to us from one of the Clarity spy drones launched earlier this morning. It looks like the Friedens are preparing for arrival of the UN in the coming months. Already we have found several SAM launchers alongside bunkers and other defenses as well. Luckily, they haven't found us out here. Now Europa, being the smallest of the colonies, also has the smallest population with thirty-thousand. Despite this, the moon's strategic value is enormous because of its main resource: water. Europa is essentially a world-ocean encased in ice, with the colony located in a spot where the ice is thickest, at three kilometers or so. The water harvested from the ocean below the surface feeds the majority of the population on the other moons, and before this debacle Mars as well. Our topside photographs reveal that the above complex is only two square kilometers big, not enough to house mining equipment plus room for thirty-thousand. Because of this, most of the colony is underground, which makes sense since Europa's surface is incredibly radioactive due to its proximity to Jupiter itself.

This makes the mission a bit more difficult then originally planned. Because of the majority of the colony lies underground, with the possibility of the mining tunnels extending farther and below that, we will need teams to infiltrate the colony rather than just observe it." This was met with a quite a few furrowed brows, as infiltration, while possible, dramatically increased the risks of being spotted and possibly even captured.

"Our plan of attack however, is simple. Alpha and Bravo Platoons will use our four Seagull transports to land on the surface. We drop you here, eighteen hours out and using a slingshot orbit, approach on the dark side of the moon, which should allow you to bypass sensors and other detection. Once there, you will have to stay under the radar screen of ten meters. Alpha and Bravo will be deployed ten kilometers from the target, outside the ground sensor zone. Once there you will have two hours to make it to the target before you are fried by the radiation, which your Mk II armor is only partially-rated for unfortunately.

Alpha platoon will disrupt jamming equipment in order to re-establish communications with us. Do not disrupt radio communications itself because that will be a dead giveaway to the other colonies that something is up. Furthermore, Alpha will disrupt the power supply to the SAM's along with disrupting any non-critical power sources. Bravo will enter the colony on the other side. Bravo's primary mission is to recon the area for important objects and rooms inside the colony. Schematics of the colony and any other types of maps are primary objectives. Your secondary mission is to find the core or cores of the colony and damage them. We want the colony to look like its undergoing a series of malfunctions, not under attack. Any questions so far?" Daniel raised his hand.

"Sir, what is the purpose specifically of just interrupting normal operations for the colony?" asked Daniel.

"Command wants as many non-combatants evacuated from the colony as possible before the arrival of the fleet. Hopefully our operations on Europa will cause such an evacuation to occur. Overcrowding the other

moons will make negotiations and our job easier once the fleet arrives, as the other colonies will be under duress. Also, our mission was never to destroy the colony, just damage it and disrupt the normal flow of daily life for them" responded Valencia.

"So our operations will be psychological warfare?" asked another Marine.

"Yes, essentially" replied Valencia. This got several nods from the men, as psychologically damaging the enemy decreased their effectiveness and also, as Valencia said, made their jobs easier.

"Sir, what is the escape plan should the operation go FUBAR?" asked Daniel. It was a valid question which hung on the minds of almost all in the room.

"We can arrive within weapons range in twelve hours and bombard the colony with the Gauss Cannon as we evac you and your men. The _Verona_ and the _Huai He_ will assist and protect you as well."

"But we will have to wait for twelve hours for air support to even arrive sir?" replied Daniel.

"Yes, and the escape option is our last resort, and destroying the colony will not only send a clear message to the Friedens that we are here, but also jeopardize any chance of negotiating we have. Remember, this is a covert operation. Destruction is only a last resort."

"Yes sir" said Daniel.

"Any further questions?" asked Valencia. There were none.

"Dismissed, and Semper Fi." The Marines left and returned to their barracks to explain the mission to the men. After the briefing the men of Alpha platoon went to the weapons locker to get ready. Once more Daniel keyed open his locker and started to put on his armor.

The Mk II Wolf is a Special Forces upgrade over the standard Mk I now employed by the Marines. Made out of a new fabric that borrowed extensively from spacesuits of old, this lightweight, flexible, vacuum-sealed suit allowed the Marines to operate in space-based environments. There were additional flexible kevlar plates that covered the torso, outer arm, elbow, outer leg, and knees of the soldier. The helmet was a special-rated kevlar-titanium-alloy mix that could deflect up to 9mm rounds proficiently. The helmet came with a HUD-less self-enclosed visor, helmet recorder, and flashlight. Attached on the back was a small power supply which fed the oxygen regulators for three hours, fed water, and powered the light and recorder along with the COM. All this and more were covered in the standard grey, black, and white digital camouflage pattern.

Daniel got the rest of his weapons and equipment stowed and ready, and proceeded down the corridor once more to the hangar bays. He stopped his men in a line outside one of the troop bays of the TC-20 Seagull, and checked them over to make sure their armor was properly fitted, and that they were good to fight once the bay doors deployed.

Once the check was complete, he and his men, one by one, fit themselves in tightly like a can of sardines for the ride over to Europa. _This is going to suck_.

* * *

><p>Inside A TC-20 Seagull, On Approach to Europa, Jovian Moons, January 21 2160 (Military Calendar)<p>

First Lieutenant Daniel Claymore grunted as his legs cramped again for the umpteenth time in the near-eighteen-hour flight him and nine other men had taken to land on Europa. He did not think it was possible, but the smell of ten sweaty, tightly cramped men had somehow penetrated his helmets visor. His combat load did not help with the space either. Cradled in his arms was his SCAR with several reloads in his belt. On his thigh was his M12 Rapture 10 mm pistol, which held twelve rounds in its magazine. On his utility belt were two fragmentation grenades and two flashbang grenades. Attached to the side of his right shin was his combat knife, a sixteen-centimeter blade made of titanium-steel, and balanced for throwing; perfect for the stealth kill.

The journey to Europa had gone smoothly, despite the eighteen hour ride, and Daniel felt that so far the mission was going to plan.

"We're now approaching the dark side of the moon" came the pilot's voice, identified as Alpha-212, into Daniel's COM. He sent an acknowledgement back to the pilot and continued his pondering. Minutes seem to pass when a sudden lurch came to the vehicle. It caused everybody in the cabin to jump and crash down in a heap of armor. The men were able to straighten themselves out, but the lurches continued unending. Daniel guessed that they were on the surface now, hugging the ground several meters off, while trying to avoid the craters and large bunches of ice which dotted the landscape.

Daniel soon felt the craft slowing down as its VTOL engines pivoted opposite of their prior direction and fired, bringing the craft to a slow halt. The forward engines then fired quickly, causing the Seagull to lower smoothly to the ground. The ramps then opened, soundlessly in the vacuum onto the surface. Daniel's legs cramped again as he ran out onto the surface, stretching for the first time in hours; he crouched, weapon raised to defend the ship, but no one was there to attack. The first thing Daniel noticed however, was the low gravity of the moon, his memory told him that it was point-one-four gees, not much compared to Mars' point-three-eight gees. It was also bright-white with a blue twinge, which happened because of the endless ice.

Daniel looked back at the transports as his squad and another of Alpha platoon moved out. The transports only carried forty hours of fuel, so they would stay behind in case something went horribly wrong and required the men to be evacuated immediately. Third squad would stay behind to guard the transports as first and second marched on for the mission.

Daniel marched forward at a brisk pace, and at the head of his squad. He and his men were racing against the clock to reach the colony before the radiation killed them. _This is going to be one long

day_.

End
file.